

LETTER

FROM THE REVEREND

MR. JAMES M'GREGOR,

MINISTER, AT PICTOU, NOVA SCOTIA,

TO

THE GENERAL ASSOCIATE SYNOD,

APRIL 30th, 1793

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF SYNOD.

PAISLEY:

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M.DCC.LXIII.

EDINBURGH, May 3d. 1793.

THE General Associate Synod read a letter from Mr. James M'Gregor, Minister at Pictou in N. Scotia, setting forth the very clamant condition of that country for want of the gospel, and earnestly supplicating the Synod to send some Ministers or Preachers to assist him in answering the many and urgent calls he had to preach the gospel. The Synod greatly approving the zealous spirit that breathes through the whole of Mr. M'Gregor's letter; and judging it may be of advantage for engaging young men to undertake to go to N. Scotia, if they had an opportunity for the perusal of it;—they agreed it should be printed and published. And they appointed Messrs. John Buist, Archibald Bruce and James Robertson to oversee the publication of it; and to add *explanatory* notes, as they might see cause.

JAMES MORISON, Syn. Cls.

MR. M'GREGOR, missionary from the Associate Synod to the Gaelic congregation of Pictou, Nova Scotia, was ordained by the Associate Presbytery of Glasgow, May 31st, 1786. He has laboured with great success. A petition from Mr. M'Gregor and his people for one to take the charge of the half of that congregation, and sundry petitions from other places in that country for Ministers to preach in English, are still before the Synod, partly from the demand they have for preachers at home, and especially from the aversion of young men to go abroad.

TO THE REVEREND THE MODERATOR AND
REMANENT MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSOCIATE SYNOD, TO MEET AT
EDINBURGH, April 30th, 1793.

REVEREND FATHERS AND BRETHREN,

SOME years ago application was made to you for another Minister to this congregation. Several other places in this quarter have applied to you since, and none of us have hitherto received any supply. I beg leave therefore to put you in mind of our petitions, and to call your attention to a few arguments in behalf of this country and Province; to move you to compassion for us in our destitute situation, and to grant us some speedy and effectual assistance. As to Pictou, ever since the Synod's appointment of another Minister to us, which by Divine Providence was ineffectual, I have considered it as two congregations. I have endeavoured hitherto to labour equally in both, though one congregation is enough for one man. And as there is a necessity for the two languages, the case is the same as to the people's benefit, as if one man had the charge of four different congregations at home. From this it is easy to see what a small share of public ordinances must fall to every one. Many of the people indeed make comfortable progress under ordinances, but how much greater might be expected were we blessed with the labours of another Minister? We suffer peculiar hardship in the time of dispensing the sacrament of the supper. It is hard for one man to dispense the sacrament in two different languages without any assistance; it is hard that the one or the

other half of the people must be idle during the whole time of public worship, throughout the solemnity. This is such a hardship as none under the inspection of the Synod, I suppose, ever suffered but ourselves. The assistance of a Minister who could speak but the English would relieve us out of this difficulty, as he could dispense ordinances to the one half and I to the other.

In the summer of 1791 a considerable number of emigrants, chiefly Roman Catholics, from the west Highlands and Isles, came hither. They much need the gospel, and the help of another Minister might be very useful to them. Some of them usually hear with us, and probably more would if we had ordinances more frequently dispensed.

Because I have two or rather four congregations to supply at home, it is impossible for me to go much abroad to supply various places that are in great need, and constantly craving. The case of these is the more deplorable that there are but few Ministers in the province, and still fewer that have any tolerable claim to faithfulness in the work of the Lord. The less supply they get, and the longer they are without a fixed dispensation of the gospel, ignorance must prevail the more, and as it prevails they must become a readier prey to seducers. It is hardly possible for you to conceive the advantage that Satan gets over a people long deprived of the public ordinances of the gospel, religious books, and the conversation of people acquainted with the doctrines of Christ. If any one call himself a preacher, and be able to blab out any thing whatsoever, there he will get hearers, admirers, followers. Were the glorious gospel of Christ preached to them, it would certainly have success. These people have a powerful claim to your pity.

Reverend Fathers and Brethren, I have the satisfaction to inform you that, so far as I have had ac-

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cess to know, there is a greater desire in this Province to apply to you for Ministers than to any other denomination of Presbyterians. Petitions from several other places would have been sent to you, but the people are discouraged because all applications from this quarter have hitherto been unsuccessful. This discouragement cannot be removed till some Ministers be sent over; and they should be sent without delay, for it is not to be supposed that people will continue always waiting. Had we a few Ministers they would serve their own congregations, and help others, and hereby the progress of ignorance, errors and delusions would be much checked, the work of the Lord advanced, and the people encouraged to apply for more Ministers. Though the Synod were to send over presently six or seven Ministers, I hope neither the Synod nor the Ministers sent, nor yet we would repent it. There is little reason to fear that they would want labour or sustenance. Let the Synod send over all that number or any part of it which they shall think expedient, with all expedition. *O how long shall I dwell solitarily in the wood. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour; for if they fall the one will lift up his fellow: but wo to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up.*

But I apprehend, Reverend Fathers and Brethren, that there is much more need to use arguments with young men to come than with the Synod to appoint them. The Synod has always shewn a forwardness to propagate the gospel in America*: But many of their appointments for that purpose have been unsuccessful and ineffectual. It seems that no invitation, no encouragement, no argument will move many who are called to preach the gospel to the Americans. Moses' excuse is still in their mouth, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send. Send another and not me.

* See A Note, p. 15.

They are strangers to generous obedience. They belie the Lord Jesus Christ, saying, that his yoke is grievous, and his burden heavy. Instead of being ambitious, as they ought, to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, they shun it, they dread it as bitterness and death. That abundant consolation which is to be enjoyed through abundant sufferings shall never be theirs, if they can help it. With great grief and sorrow have many serious christians, both at home and abroad, observed their unaccountable backwardness to engage in the Lord's work in this continent. This sorrow touches me now much more sensibly than ever I expected. I cannot help deploring the case of my fellow-creatures perishing for lack of knowledge, while those whose business and duty it is to help them are utterly unwilling to do them the least service. I fear the blood of many American souls shall be required at the hands of Ministers in North-Britain. I cannot believe that they could so steel their hearts against their brethren, if they only saw them, and understood their forlorn situation. Could they see a people brought up in a wilderness, without instruction, without example, without books, and without the public ordinances of God's grace, surely their bowels would yearn, their hearts would melt, and they would fly to their relief. But, alas! they see them not. They only hear of them at times, and an imperfect report, not frequently repeated can make but a feeble impression on their minds. Thus the heritage of the Lord is neglected, and the dearly beloved of his soul given into the hand of her enemies, and they who ought to take the charge of her consider it not. But let them remember that their consciences *ought* to be tender, that they ought to open their ears to the first intimation of their brethren's distress, and not to be rebellious, nor turn away back. The Lord sees the affliction of his people, though they see it not, and

observes with a jealous eye the backwardness, the disobedience of those whose duty it is to help them, and do it not. That selfish lukewarm spirit cannot fail to be very offensive to the glorious King of Zion. Instead of that fervent and unconquerable zeal, that noble and disinterested patriotism which shone so conspicuously in Paul and other Apostles of our Lord, men who had no selfishness, no home, no attachment but whither the Lord called them; who had a keen and eager eye to discover the path of duty, and were instantly ready to follow the calls of providence; who were exquisitely jealous of their self-will, and of the counsels of flesh and blood in every shape; and who despised danger, and believed and knew that every kind of suffering, and death itself was gain: there now prevails in those who are their professed admirers and followers (and I hope are really so in part), a love of temporal ease, and convenience, a reluctance at being disturbed, and moved out of the narrow circle of their nationality, and an excessive caution and fear of venturing, suffering, or losing any thing confided for the sake of Christ or his church; as if they dedicated themselves to the Lord in the work of a ministry upon condition that he would gratify their humour, or comply with their inclination*. I fear this ungenerous spirit is an evil sign of the present, and forebodes no good to the rising generation. If there remain unused any means in the power of the Synod whereby it may be remedied, they ought to be tried.

Were there any great objections, or any remarkable cause of discouragement to Ministers coming to this country they might be borne with. What if they have a long voyage and a strange country before them? Have they not along with that every encouragement they can wish? Could they reckon up a long list of Ministers drowned or tossed about of

* See B. Note, p. 15.

violent storms and tempests in their voyage to America; or could they pretend they had some terrible persecution to face upon their arrival, they might be allowed to fear. But who knows not that there is not, on the globe, safer sailing than across the Atlantic, nor a more kind, generous and free people than the Americans? Their welcome in this country would be, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things. How shall I excuse my reluctant brethren in the Ministry when I see the men of the world undergo these dangers and difficulties, (if there be any), for far inferior considerations? Do not the servants and officers of his Britannic Majesty cross that ocean at any time in obedience to their superiors? Do not the worshippers of Mammon traverse the Atlantic incessantly, even in the stormiest seasons of the year, for paltry trifles of filthy lucre? Do not multitudes of emigrants cross it every year, merely for the hope of earning more easily or comfortably food and raiment for their bodies? And above all what shall I say, when rank Arminians, Socinians, Popish priests, and filthy dreamers, men whom earth and sea are ready to swallow up, and for whom there is no divine promise of grace or assistance to depend upon in their work, not only traverse the Atlantic, but, uninvited, unattended, and often unrewarded, scour the wilds and deserts of America in cold and heat, to make proselytes to their pernicious opinions? Alas! shall they who know themselves to serve the best of all Masters, and to be engaged in the most precious and honourable of all employments, who are not bid to cross that sea but in the calmest and mildest season of the year, and who may expect a hearty welcome from their friends before them; nay more, who have the best reason to expect the attendance and ministrations of angels, and the blessing, favour and protection of an infinite-

ly gracious and compassionate God and Saviour: shall these flatly refuse? It is astonishing that any servant of Christ can seriously think that his Divine Master will admit of such an excuse. For my own part I know not whether I should more pity or detest the sorry cowardice and pusillanimity of those dastardly spirits who fright themselves with such a bugbear. I almost think it a happy thing that the Atlantic lies between them and us to bar such cowards from coming hither.

The severe climate of this country is a terror to some. But tender and delicate females are able to bear it with ease. Though it is cold for a while in winter, yet upon the whole it is more healthy than that of Britain or the united states of America, and I suppose as agreeable*.

Again, another strong objection is the difficulty of leaving father, mother, relations, acquaintance, and country. To this the words of our Saviour are so plain and decisive an answer that it is a wonder that any one should for a moment entertain that objection. Upon the one hand his gracious promise, every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife or children, or lands for my name's sake shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life. Upon the other his righteous threatening, he that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it. And he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. But after all, I fear that this objection maintains its ground in the heart with more force than is commonly suspected. That natural and strong attachment which they have to country and friends, and of course that reluctance (equally strong) to leave them, beside their usual and

* See C Note p. 15, 16.

common power, acquire on this occasion much additional force, so that under their influence they represent to themselves this country much more gloomy and disagreeable than it really is, they magnify beyond measure the smallest difficulty that lies in their way to it, and create many where there are none. I may apply to them the parable of the man who married a wife, and could not come. Their hearts are wedded elsewhere, and they cannot, they cannot prevail with themselves to come hither. And indeed if the authority of the glorious Redeemer will not move them, in vain shall I hope to prevail by my arguments. But of what use are such in the service of Christ? To what purpose do they call him Lord and Master? Did not he speak those words from a foresight of the very case of ministers going from Britain to America, and with a special application to them? Did he not interpose his authority, and promise, and threatening for their very sakes? and shall his words be without meaning or effect? It is certainly a great shame for the ministers of the more clear, free and joyous dispensation of the New Testament to come so far behind those of the Old. Levi could say unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children. I suppose it will be necessary for the Synod to take considerable pains with young men whom they appoint to America, that if possible they may thoroughly undermine and remove this stubborn objection. One generous effort, could they be prevailed upon to make it, would burst its shackles, and put them ever after in the way of duty and comfort. And how much preferable would it be to do a little violence to their feelings and affections for once, than to be at times, while they live, subject to twinges of conscience for having refused a great and lasting duty.

But I am afraid they will shield themselves from

conscience also. They may think if they refuse to go to America, they shall be as profitably employed in other parts of the vineyard. Others have refused before, and they see them not otherwise than well, and they shall fare no worse. But I beg leave to tell them that herein they are widely mistaken. Though the Master may employ them elsewhere he must account their refusal a disobedience and offence, nor will he let it go without chastisement. I am not inclined to tell them that hereby they endanger their souls, as to their eternal state, though perhaps it might not be amiss for them, to consider whether such disobedience may not be a token of the naughtiness of their hearts. I am sure that no servant of Christ ever did or ever will lose by his obedience or yet gain by his disobedience more than others. While the world stands the Lord will not only make a difference between him who serveth God and him who serveth him not, but moreover he will make a great difference between him who serveth him perversely, frowardly, negligently, and him who serveth him freely, generously and punctually. For in contempt and scorn of all human devices for ease and comfort God will be merciful to the merciful, pure to the pure, and froward to the froward. Though the Lord may not cast them out of the ministry, nor deprive them of all success in it, yet they may expect that he shall deal them out both comfort and success with a sparing hand: and it is not possible that they can have that abundant, full, soul-cheering and enriching joy and consolation which they might enjoy were they generously to forsake father, mother, friends and country for Christ's sake and the gospel's.

Disobedience to appointments for America is now become so common and fashionable that I fear they will henceforth be made little account of, so that it is hoping against hope for us to expect a competent supply. But I must warn my young brethren, whe-

ther they will hear or whether they will forbear, that the more the call to preach the gospel to the Americans is neglected it grows the louder, and the sin of turning a deaf ear to it the greater. Christ now says to them, with peculiar emphasis, *Will ye also refuse?* And let them remember that there is a cup of fatherly chastisement a filling-up for the disobedient children of God as well as wrath for his enemies. No one can say how long his patience may last, only it is not to be supposed that he will defer so long to correct those as to punish these. *You only have I known, therefore will I punish you.* Let them therefore take heed that they do not serve themselves heirs to them who have refused former appointments, lest they get the cup to drink. Though it be administered by the hand of a father it may be very bitter.

I am not fond of using so much severity. I would much rather allure my brethren over, or rather I wish they would of their own accord come chearfully to the work of the Lord, without regarding consequences. My dear young Brethren, let me recommend America to you. Whatever it be to others, it is the best place for Ministers that I know in the world. Only be prevailed upon to come. You will see that every thing which seemed against you will be really for you. The very ignorance of the people will be unspeakably in your favour; for there is every probability, of your being more successful among such, and you will have a far better opportunity of observing the success of your labour than if you were to enter into the labours of others, or build where the foundation was previously laid. I have been here above six years, in as disadvantageous circumstances, I suppose, as any whom the Synod ever sent to this continent; and though indeed I have been in it, in weakness, in fear, in trembling, yet I account it the happiest thing that ever befel me that I was sent to America. I had my reluctance, my

struggle ere I set off, but I have reason to bless God while I live, that I was not suffered to comply with the counsels of flesh and blood to stay at home. I am sure that all the world would not keep you out of America if ye only knew what it yields. O taste and see that our God is good. Only believe, and you shall surely see his glory, you shall see it far beyond what you can expect. He will supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. He will grant you more of the unutterable and glorious joy of faith in this wilderness than in the most splendid cities of Britain. You shall indeed be partakers of the afflictions of the Gospel. Let this be your joy, not your discouragement, for no suffering shall befall you here but what shall be measured out to you by infinite tenderness, love and faithfulness; and attention to your ability to bear; and withal counterbalanced with exceeding joy. God will make all grace to abound towards you, that ye always having all sufficiency in all things may abound unto every good work, being enriched in every thing unto all bountifulness to God's praise. I shall not say that God is better in America than in Britain, but I mistake it if you shall not find him better to you.

Reverend fathers and brethren, if after all I can say, the Synod cannot send, young men will not run; our hope shall not be lost, we shall not be cut off for our part. We know who made Isaiah to say, Here am I, send me; who said, Lo, I am with you always even to the end of the world. We can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengtheneth us. He shall make worm Jacob to thresh the mountains and beat them small. Our merciful and faithful high priest has a most perfect knowledge of our situation and his most abundant and tender compassion for us will not suffer him to leave us unrelieved for one moment longer than our good requires.--

© Lord, look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory, where is thy zeal, and thy strength, and the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards us? They shall not be restrained.

Reverend fathers and brethren, I hope I shall obtain your pardon, if any of you think I have written in a strain too keen. My feelings and thoughts on this subject cannot be the same with yours. I have been long alone. We have been repeatedly disappointed. We fear we shall be so again. I know that the objections which prevent our help are but trifles. I see the misery of my fellow-creatures without the gospel.

May the God of the whole earth bless you, and keep you. Jehovah make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. Jehovah lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. May the spirit of wisdom and knowledge guide you in all your deliberations, and second your appointments. May he send forth labourers into his own harvest, and give them willingness of heart to go to the work of the Lord wherever he sends them.

I am,

Reverend Fathers and Brethren,

Your fellow-servant in Christ's Gospel,

Pictou, Sept.
29th 1792.

JAMES MACGREGOR.

A. Note, page 5th.

Ever since [the year 1753, the Synod have missioned Ministers and Preachers, from time to time, to North America. Some congregations, of the now United States, and Pictou in Nova Scotia, sent home money for the expence of their missions: but the expence of the greatest number of the missions has been defrayed by the Synod, and their congregations in Scotland. And the Synod, for the encouragement of young men, and relief of the churches abroad, have, by a late act, made their public funds liable to be charged with the expence of missionaries returning from America, if, after a trial of a few years, they cannot be reconciled to a settlement in that part of the world.

B. Note, page 7th.

The Synod are heartily grieved at the reluctance of Preachers to undertake missions to America. The language in this letter may appear severe; but some allowance should be made for one in the situation of Mr. McGregor, separated from his Brethren for many years, unable to answer the demands of those who apply to him, and often disappointed of expected assistance. His disinterested and exemplary conduct in his undertaking the mission, and his patient continuance in his labours, have such a resemblance of the spirit of the primitive apostolical times, as will excuse the warmth and zeal with which he addresses his Brethren to partake with him in the difficult work, which he has found to be at the same time so very pleasant.

C. Note, page 9th.

In illustration of the above, some observations in a letter of December 30th 1790, from Mr. McGregor to Mr. Buik, *to be communicated*, may be selected.

I. As to fog or mist. Nova Scotia is a great deal clearer of it than any part that ever I saw of Scotland. Upon the fishing banks round the south and east coasts there is a great deal of fog.—But, the inland country, instead of being foggy, is remarkably clear. Along the coast, to the northward, there is very little fog. We have it only for a few days in the year at Pictou, viz. in May.—Before I came to this country, I thought it was

foggy, chiefly from the accounts of Geographers; and I was surprised, when, after a year's trial, I found it so much the reverse. You may confidently contradict any man who will assert that Nova Scotia is foggy, except a narrow strip along the south and east coasts.

II. As to rain. I am confident we have much less rain here than in Scotland. It rains in April, but it cannot be called a rainy month. From May, 'till November, in general, it is drier than at home, and more agreeable. November is the only month that can be called rainy.

III. As to wholesomeness. Nova Scotia is far more wholesome than Scotland. There are people here from a variety of nations, and it is generally agreed that it is the most wholesome place ever they were in. The following observations prove its wholesomeness. 1st, About 22 or 23 years ago, the first settlers came to Pictou, viz. 5 or 6 families; about 17 years ago about 30 families; 15 years ago 12 families. The next reinforcement was at the peace. Now, as far as I can recollect, there are not any heads of those families, male or female, yet dead except one old man. 2d. * For my own part, I do not remember that sickness has confined me one hour to my bed since I came here.

IV. As to the severity of the climate. The winter is severe indeed; But we are not naked or destitute of firewood. Some freeze to death, but they are generally drunkards. Some lose their toes and the skin of their fingers, but they are generally fool hardy. Accidents have happened to the most cautious, but very seldom. Our severe weather is not so disagreeable nor hurtful as the cold, wet, sleety weather at home; nor have we ever above three nights of severe frost at once. It never fails to relax, and it generally thaws gently for a few days after the third night of severe frost. But at any rate, our charming spring and summer make up fully for the severity of our winter. I believe, there is no part of the globe where there is a more beautiful spring than in Nova Scotia. Upon the whole, if I had no inducement to see old Scotland but its climate, I would never desire a sight of it.

* Particular cases of delicate people omitted in this extract.